

Oriental Echoes.

Porto Rican Music.

Like all other Spanish speaking peoples, the Porto Ricans are fond of music. Every cafe has its orchestra, for a cafe could hardly do business without one. Every main street during the latter part of the day has its little itinerant band of guitar and violin players, and the warm nights are made pleasant to the strollers along the streets by the sound of stringed instruments which floats from behind the latticed, vine clad screen of private residences.

Nearly all the airs are pitched in a minor key, which, even when intended to be joyous, contains a plaint to the Anglo-Saxon fond of Sousa's robust music. To one who has traveled in Spanish lands the music of Porto Rico at first seems very familiar, but the ear is not long in discovering something novel in the accompaniment of the melody.

It sounds at first like the rhythmical shuffle of feet upon a sanded floor, one might suppose some expert clog dancer was nimbly stepping to the music made by the violins and guitars. The motion is almost too quick, too complicated, for this, however, and it is the deftness of fingers, and not feet, which produces it.

It comes from the only musical instrument native to the West Indies, the "guira," which word is pronounced "huir-r-a," with a soft roll and twist of the tongue only possible to the native. The "guira" is a gourd varying in size in different instruments. On the inverse curve of the gourd are cut slits like those in the top of the violin. On the other side of the gourd, opposite the holes, is a series of deep scratches. The player balances the gourd in his left hand, holding it tightly, that none of the resonance may be lost.

With the right hand he rapidly rubs this roughened side of the gourd with a two-tined steel fork. In the hands of a novice this produces nothing but a harsh, disagreeable noise. In the hands of a native "guira" player a wonderful rhythmic sound comes from this dried vegetable shell—a sound which, in its place in the orchestra, becomes music, and most certainly gives splendid time and considerable volume to the performance.

The player's hand moves with lightning rapidity. The steel fork at times makes long sweeps the whole length of the gourd, and then again vibrates with incredible swiftness over but an inch or two of its surface. There seems to be a perfect method in its playing, though no musical record is before the player, and it seems to be a matter purely of his fancy and his ear, as to how his part shall harmonize with the melody of the strangled instrument.

The "guira" is found in all the West Indies, but seems especially popular in Porto Rico. The players generally make their own instruments and apparently become attached to them, for as poor as these strolling players are, they will hardly part with their "guiras," even when offered ten times their real value. They are distinctly a Porto Rican curio, and strange as it may seem, Porto Rico is probably more destitute of tourists' "loot" than any other foreign country known to the traveling American. The tourist who can secure a "guira" may congratulate himself, for it will be hard to get, and is the very thing which can be carried away from the Island as a souvenir which is distinctly native and peculiar.

The Popular Flowers of Japan.

The following may be mentioned as the popular flowers of Japan, and most closely associated by the Japanese with the different seasons of the year:

The first to appear is the plum blossom, which is hailed with delight as the harbinger of spring, and enjoys, therefore, the greatest popularity.

The plum is closely followed by the cherry blossom, which almost rivals the former as a favorite.

The next, and the last of the spring flowers, is the wistaria. Summer's flowers include the peony, iris, and the lotus; while autumn claims one of the chief favorites, the chrysanthemum, and also the morning glory.

Winter has no flowers, but here the poetic imagination of the Japanese fills the void; for when trees and landscape are whitened with snow, he converts this, in his picturesque fancy, into "winter flowers," and this exquisite love and appreciation of all that nature affords in her various phases, is a strongly developed trait, common to all classes of Japan.

Certain flowers are considered lucky and unlucky—the latter including all such as are supposed to possess poisonous qualities. I found, for instance, that one of the wild flowers, a beautiful scarlet lily, known as the shibuta-nohanna, which I greatly admired, was regarded with disfavor and was never used for decoration or flower arrangements, for the reason that it was a flower of ill omen.

On the other hand, a favorite arrangement, formed of a combination of pine, bamboo and plum blossoms, is symbolic of good luck and everlasting happiness. It is frequently used on festive occasions and figures conspicuously in the New Year decorations that are arranged over the gate and doorway.

Stevenson and the Beggar.

An American who visited the Stevensons at Samoa relates that the Samoans have a practice of begging. They boldly ask for whatever they may covet, wherever it may be found. The novelist became tired of this practice, and therefore said one day to a Samoan friend, who had acquired from him a necktie, handkerchief and some other trinket, "Is there anything else you want?"

The Samoan made a hasty survey of the room.

"There is the piano," suggested Mr. Stevenson, ironically.

"Yes," replied the native, I know, but," he added, apologetically, "I don't know how to play it."

A Parcel Post Convention between the United States and Germany, which Dr. Mumm von Schwartzstein, the German Ambassador, and Mr. Smith, the Postmaster-General, signed on Saturday, is the first of its kind between the United States and any country of Europe. It will come into effect on October 1.

Advices from Samoa, dated the 23rd inst., report all quiet in the islands. The collier transport Aberanda had arrived from New York with material for the American naval jetty at Pago-Pago. Her Majesty's sloop Torch and the German cruiser Cormoran were the only warships in the harbor. Business was prosperous, and a large amount of copra was being made. The officials were working together harmoniously.

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